

On behalf of New York's 21st District, I would like to thank Joseph for his dedication to serving his community, and I congratulate him for reaching this significant milestone.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 40, COMMISSION TO STUDY AND DEVELOP REPARATION PROPOSALS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS ACT

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, January 4, 2021

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I rise today to announce the reintroduction of H.R. 40, the "Commission to Study and Develop Reparation proposals for African Americans Act," legislation which was cosponsored by 173 Members in the 116th Congress and today is being reintroduced with more than 100 original cosponsors.

This legislation was first introduced in 1989 by the late and beloved Congressman John Conyers of Michigan, the former chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary, and is intended to examine the institution of slavery in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present, and, further, to recommend appropriate remedies.

Since the initial introduction of this legislation, proponents have made substantial progress in elevating the discussion of reparatory justice at the national level and joining the mainstream international debate on the issues.

Though some have tried to deflect the importance of these conversations by focusing on individual monetary compensation, the real issue is whether and how this nation can come to grips with the legacy of slavery that still infects current society.

Through legislation, resolutions, news, and litigation, we are moving closer to making more strides in the movement toward reparatory relief.

Today, there are more people at the table—more activists, more scholars, more CEOs, more state and local officials, and more Members of Congress.

However, despite this progress and the election of the first American President of African descent, the legacy of slavery lingers heavily in this nation.

While we have focused on the social effects of slavery and segregation, its continuing economic inequalities and disparities remain largely ignored by mainstream analysis.

These economic issues are the root cause of many critical issues in the African American community today, such as education, healthcare and criminal justice policy, including policing practices.

The call for reparatory justice represents a commitment to entering a constructive dialogue on the role of slavery and racism in shaping present-day conditions in our community and American society.

H.R. 40 is important and needed legislation because it goes beyond exploring the economic implications of slavery and segregation.

It is a holistic bill in the sense that establishes a commission to examine the moral and social implications of slavery.

Madam Speaker, the United States is the world's only superpower and boasts the larg-

est economy in the history of the world and for many years was the world's indispensable nation and the example that all aspiring democracies wished to emulate.

At the same time, this nation has also been home to many searing instances of social unrest resulting from racial injustices, as we are now witnessing on the streets of big cities and small towns in urban and rural communities.

We are seeing Americans, by the millions, across the country, coming from all races and ages, engaging in what the late John Lewis called "good trouble" by protesting and demanding an end to the systemic racial inequality in our criminal justice system that too often victimizes and disproportionately treats black Americans worse, *ceteris paribus*, when it comes to suspicion, apprehension, arrest, detention, trial, sentencing, and incarceration.

While the brutal deaths of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville shocked the conscience of the nation, most black Americans will tell you what they experienced is not new, but has been occurring for generations, if not centuries.

What is critically important to understand is that the instances of brutal and unfair treatment the nation has witnessed this year cannot be attributed to the proverbial few "bad apples in the bushel" but is instead the foreseeable consequence of systemic racism and racial inequality in the system.

Not just the criminal justice system, but the health care system, the economic system, and the educational system to name the most glaring examples.

To find our way out of this dark time, we need to understand how it came to be.

That is the purpose of H.R. 40, which establishes a commission to examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies.

Among other requirements, the commission shall identify (1) the role of federal and state governments in supporting the institution of slavery; (2) forms of discrimination in the public and private sectors against freed slaves and their descendants; and (3) lingering negative effects of slavery on living African-Americans and society.

Truth and reconciliation about the Original Sin of American Slavery is necessary to light the way to the beloved community we all seek.

The uncomfortable truth is that the United States owes its position as the most powerful nation in the world to its slave-owning past.

Initially, slavery in America was not instituted for black people.

The colonists in the southern states simply wanted persons to cultivate and hue the soil of the New World's wild untamed lands.

And they wanted to exploit these boundless natural resources as cheaply as possible.

At first, they tried to enslave the indigenous persons they found when they arrived from Old World but that did not work because the native persons they encountered were nomadic rather than agrarian.

So next, landowners turned to poor persons from Europe arriving to work as indentured servants, but this did not work either for several reasons.

First, such persons were not as hardy in working under the difficult conditions that existed.

Also, because as subjects of the British Crown, indentured workers enjoyed legal rights and protections.

Finally, being white themselves, European indentured servants could escape and blend into the general colonial population.

That is why the landowners set their sights on the western coast of Africa and its people.

That experiment in trafficking in persons failed as well and culminated in a bloody Civil War, but not before America profited handsomely from what President Lincoln rightly characterized in his Second Inaugural as "the bondsmen's two-hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil."

Slavery helped make America an industrial nation but at the cost of inflicting physical, economic, social, psychological, and political damage on Black Americans that despite the progress that has been made continues to this day with stark racial disparities in health care, employment, housing, food, education, and indeed nearly every aspect of American life and death.

Madam Speaker, official slavery ended with the Civil War and ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment.

But unofficial slavery was continued with the new institution of sharecrop farming, a criminal justice system that would press convicts into work once done by slaves, and labor policies that dictated income for work done based upon skin color.

And, of course, all of this was reinforced by the systematic disenfranchisement of Black Americans, the "discrete and insular minority" excluded from "those political processes ordinarily to be relied upon to protect" them, to quote Chief Justice Hughes' famous *Carolene Products* Footnote 4.

For these reasons, the history of the United States is intertwined with the history of enslaved Africans in the Americas.

Madam Speaker, there is blood and there are tears, but there is also redemption and reconciliation.

But to get there, we must know the complete truth and lay our history bare.

The Commission created and empowered by H.R. 40 is a necessary first step in that effort.

I encourage all Members to join me in co-sponsoring H.R. 40, the "Commission to Study and Develop Reparation proposals for African Americans Act."

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JARED HUFFMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, January 4, 2021

Mr. HUFFMAN. Madam Speaker, I regret that due to a scheduling conflict on January 3, 2021, I was unable to cast the following vote. Should I have been present, I would have voted YEA on roll call 3.

HONORING THE LIFE OF AMEER K. EDWARD

HON. BARBARA LEE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, January 4, 2021

Ms. LEE of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Ameer K.